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# Thatcher promises debate on Prime

By Julian Haviland, Political Editor

The Prime Minister, resisted pressure from both sides of the Commons yesterday to consider putting the security service under some form of parliamentary control when she confirmed that she had referred Geoffrey Prime's treachery to the Security Commission.

She promised that there would be the fullest possible report to Parliament and a debate once the commission had finished its work.

But her final words when asked about changes in the overseeing of security were: "The present arrangements are the most appropriate and it would be unwise to open them up further".

It was necessary to keep matters limited to a few people, Mrs Margaret Thatcher said. "Otherwise we tend to open up the very matters we wish to keep secret."

She failed to satisfy Mr Michael Foot, Dr David Owen and others on the question of why the commission had been invited to see what lessons might be learnt from the Prime case as soon as the facts were known, at least from the time he was charged, on July 20.

MPs' anxiety on that point was aggravated by her disclosure that Prime underwent positive security vetting and deceived his investigators at least four times during the thirteen years in which he had access, she said, to information of "the utmost secrecy".

Mrs Thatcher told Dr Owen, who tried but failed to get an emergency debate on the question, that the advice given to her was that it was not possible for the commission to investigate Prime before he had been before the court.

MPs understood, when the

Prime Minister made a Commons statement in July, that a public announcement of a reference to the commission would prejudice Prime's trial.

But Mrs Thatcher herself had recalled then that Sir Harold Wilson, when Prime Minister in 1965, had changed the procedure so that a reference could be made without public notification before, as he said, "the trail went cold".

There was some suggestion last night that the unexplained advice to delay a reference was given by Lord Bridge of Harwich, chairman of the Security Commission.

All but the most sceptical MPs are willing to believe that those in charge of security at the Government Communications Headquarters at Cheltenham, where Prime was employed, have been rigorously examining their systems.

The Prime Minister was able to say little to the House that was not said in court on Wednesday. But she confirmed that the information that Prime had admitted passing to the Russians between 1968 and 1980 "must have alerted them to the state of our knowledge of certain important aspects of Russian defence arrangements, and to the ways in which that knowledge was obtained".

The Prime Minister told the House that the terms of reference to the commission were "to investigate the circumstances in which breaches of security have, or may have, occurred . . . and to advise . . . whether any change in security arrangements is necessary or desirable."

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